



THE NATIONAL
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Speech by PNGNRI Director, Dr. Osborne Sanida on Occasion of the Launch of PNGNRI Issues Paper No.43 authored by Michael Kabuni

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I want to take the opportunity to thank you all for coming to the Institute for the launch of this Issues Paper by Mr. Michael Kabuni on **“The Ineffective Dual Roles of Papua New Guinea Members of Parliament: Why it matters?”**

Let me first thank Michael Kabuni for his efforts in taking time to observe, analyse, think through and bringing out for our consideration, the issues affecting the functions of the most important Institution in Papua New Guinea, the National Parliament.

More, importantly, as he points out, it is not only for us to read and observe, but to start a national conversation. We must read, discuss further, analyze the implications and to consider improvements to our Governance System in Papua New Guinea. In our democratic system that we have adopted in Papua New Guinea at Independence, the people of Papua New Guinea through our representatives, we have elected; - elect the Executive Government to govern. Parliament also must make laws, ensure that the organs of Government including the Executive Government are performing effectively, for the wellbeing of all Papua New Guineans.

As the famous US President Abraham Lincoln is quoted for; “A Government Of the People, By the People and, For the People”; is what the most important institution of our Representative Democratic system, The National Parliament,

must set out to do. Any weaknesses, any defects will lead to ineffective systems of Government, especially by the most important institution of Governance in PNG. It is a risk to good governance, and to good decision-making, that affects the collective wellbeing of us, the people of Papua New Guinea.

Our founding fathers consulted widely and adopted a carefully constructed Constitution of Papua New Guinea. They pooled together a people of more than a thousand tribes to come together and live as one people, one country, agreeing to a representative Parliamentary System of Government. They created Institutions of Government that have in the main performed very well in holding the nation state together and to govern for our collective wellbeing. Starting from a small group of well-educated persons in the modern sense of schools and educational institutions, we now have most Members of Parliament having University Education. Many of our early leaders who had no formal education, were very wise, and they also contributed their knowledge and wisdom to nation building at that time.

The functions of the National Parliament in the early years of nationhood, worked reasonably well including the Parliamentary Committee systems. For instance, the Public Accounts Committee in the 1980s would call before it, Heads of Government Departments in public hearings to explain why certain funds allocated under the budgets had not been implemented. The Committee was feared, and hence kept in check financial mismanagement. The Executive Government was indeed regularly kept in check by the people's representatives, the National Parliament. Parliament also observed and guided the National Government on regional and international matters; for instance, the rebellion in Vanuatu in 1977, the establishment and development of the Pacific Forum, the United Nations, relations with China in the 1970s and PNG representation and contributions to "Rio" the first climate change world forum.

We have also through this journey, made a few fundamental changes to our Constitution, relating to the roles and responsibilities of our representatives and this is having serious implications for our young Democracy.

As Michael Kabuni has pointed out, the changes to the *Organic Law on Provincial Governments* in 1996 and the abolishment of a separately elected Provincial Government system now had the Members of National Parliament also holding offices as representatives to the Provincial Government Legislative and Executive Government Body. Then in 2014, the District Development Authority (DDA) was created, with the National Members of Parliament as Chairs, taking up an Executive Role of Government. This in essence undermines the very important "Oversight Responsibilities" of the National Parliament. Who will be the people's representative to perform this important role? All Members of Parliament are now performing the roles of the Executive Government. In doing so, as pointed out, both functions are not being done well.

Many say that the important role of the Member of Parliament is to bring services to the people. That may be true, but there are questions also about how effective this role is being performed by Members of Parliament. There is an obvious dis-connect between the Provincial Administrative System and the District Administration – so functions of government administration are not working effectively in basic service delivery work.

There are also questions about who is really benefiting from District Services delivery mechanisms under the DDA System. As Michael Kabuni points out, a client -patron relationship that is emerging made worse by weak electoral systems that we now have, are a major concern. It may mean that services may be available to those who voted for the Member of Parliament, but others who may not have voted, are left out of the service delivery line.

There are also other obvious weaknesses that have emerged with the current Government calling for a review of the way the Prime Minister is elected, preferring a “Presidential System of Government”. Prime Minister’s we note are coming under increasing pressure from Members of Parliament to increase the funds available under the DDA; - it started from K5m a year, then to K10m and this year, we heard that K20m was being considered. We understand that there is also pressure to increase sectoral funds available under the National Development Budget programs to DDAs. In order to avoid, “Votes of No Confidence”, the Prime Ministers are being forced to consider increased budgetary allocations, that then lead to other problems.

Will a Prime Minister elected by the people as per the consultations now being undertaken by the Constitutional Law Reform Commission (CLRC) address the current concerns by giving the Prime Minister direct powers by the people? Maybe, but most likely, it will lead to other problems and concerns.

The PNG National Research Institute has over a period of more than fifty years, conducted studies and undertaken analyses of many issues affecting the development of Papua New Guinea. We have been concerned about many issues of governance, but the current deterioration of good governance at the highest levels, the weaknesses of our electoral system as observed at the 2022 National General Elections, the process through which we elect our representatives to the National Parliament, as well as the many other concerns in the broader community give us great concern. We think it is time for the Nation to take Stock.

In our view, PNG now needs to review the whole mechanisms of Governance of our Constitution in a more broadly consultative manner after nearly fifty years as an independent nation.

It is an opportune time. The CLRC review consultations underway are now being held in some parts of our country. We understand that the review is

looking at options for voting for the Prime Minister (presidential versus Westminster; structure of National Parliament; system of government; and different levels of government. The issue discussed today must be considered and addressed in any consultation or review.

Many of our political and administrative leaders who crafted the National Constitution and worked in government in the early years of our Independence with their many years of Independence are still with us. There are also church and business leaders, community leaders and ordinary citizens who raised their families, good citizens, contributing to community and national development. We need to have a process for a national conversation bringing together the older generation drawing out from them, their aspirations, their dreams and the constraints as they saw over the years at the initial independence period. Others got involved in the middle years, the formative years, the 1990's and 2000. Then there is the younger generation of the post 2000 era. We need a process, a national process to have a more holistic review of our system.

I want to thank Michael Kabuni for highlighting the need for a “National Conversation”. Our young democracy is at Stake. If we do not do anything soon, it will get even more difficult to fix and change as required.

I also want to thank the Autonomy and Decentralisation Research Project team at the PNG National Research Institute, led by Dr. Thomas Webster, who organised the National Conference on Autonomy and Decentralisation of Government last year, February 2022, where this paper was initially presented by Michael Kabuni.

The discussions at the conference concluded that we need a strong autonomous system of provincial governments that are responsible for delivery of most basic services required in our communities.

PNGNRI will explore and contribute to conversations around options for strong autonomous provincial governments. At the same time, we will discuss and explore mechanisms that will allow Members of Parliament to have access to funds for impact projects in their electorate, in ways that will not take up much of their time.

We also need to allow smooth administrative arrangements from the provincial levels to district and local government levels. We need to have clearly demarcated responsibilities for basic services. Our work will contribute to thinking and discussions that will enable us to understand and identify the weaknesses, explore options and implement agreed resolutions.

May I also take the opportunity to thank the Australian Government for the funding support to the PNGNRI for the many research activities that we have been undertaking.

It is now my pleasure to launch this special Issues Paper by Michael Kabuni titled: **“The Ineffective Dual Roles of Papua New Guinea Members of Parliament: Why it matters?”**